

Snake Alley Festival of Film

The Snake Alley Festival of Film was founded in 2011 by actor and filmmaker Lonnie Schuyler. While the Burlington Capitol Theater was being renovated, Lonnie thought a great way to reintroduce the town to the long shuttered theater was an independent film festival. The festival derives its name from Snake Alley, a street constructed in 1894 and designed to connect an upscale residential neighborhood to the business district of downtown Burlington.

The Capitol Theater finally reopened its doors in 2012 after being closed since 1977. One of the first events was SNAFF. Lonnie organized and held the event for the first four years, bringing short films and the people who made them from around the world to Southeast Iowa. Meanwhile, I was hosting the “Gathr Preview Series”, a weekly film event showcasing early previews of indie films. Lonnie would provide a short from SNAFF to kick off the feature. After our first year, Lonnie asked me if I’d take over as director so he could focus his time on his family, and the rest is history.

We will be celebrating our 10th year in 2022 after postponing the 2020 festival for obvious reasons. SNAFF started as a 3 day festival, and even had a year where it ran 5 days, but is now running Thursday thru Sunday. Over the years, our reputation as a trustworthy and worthwhile film festival has grown, as have our film and screenplay submissions. Each year we receive more submissions from all around the world. While our focus is on short films, we also feature short screenplay table reads, where local actors are cast in roles and are part of an actual live, in-person table reading so the writers and audience can hear the screenplay come to life. We’ve also held special events such as a Clerks showing with guest Brian O’Halloran and a live script reading of The Room with guest Greg Sestero.

SNAFF is a non-profit festival that depends on local support from sponsors. The Greater Burlington Convention and Visitors Bureau provide us with room blocks, community guides and funding each year to cover the costs of promotion, guests speakers and accommodations. Produce Iowa has always supported the film festival with funding and resources as well. Several downtown businesses sponsor SNAFF as they see an increase in traffic and spending while our filmmakers are visiting from out of town. Even local restaurants will provide sponsorships as they also see an increase in business during the week of the festival.

The Capitol Theater has been the home of SNAFF since its inception. With a beautiful 400 seat auditorium, digital projection, and an attached annex building perfect for sign-in and merch sales, they are the perfect partner to have for a film festival. We also hold a SNAFFterparty each night after the films and screenplay readings wrap up. Local bars and restaurants host our group and provide us with a space to socialize and network. It’s a win-win for both of us as we bring in the traffic, and they provide us a space to unwind. We like to showcase our diverse variety of options in downtown Burlington. Locals come and meet new people, learn about their projects, and experience something brand new.

Produce Iowa conducted a survey at our 2019 event to measure the economic impact of SNAFF. The

estimated economic impact was \$154,136 after compiling the data from surveys.

Each Iowa film festival offers something unique and different, so I recommend attending any and all of them. I would recommend reaching out to local groups of screenwriters, actors, filmmakers, and even your local convention & visitors groups to gauge interest. Each year our group looks for grants, sponsors and other avenues of funding. You might be surprised by who would be interested in supporting your festival once they see how it can benefit your community.